

THE GENUS *NOTOSCINCUS* (LACERTILIA, SCINCIDAE) IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA AND NORTHERN TERRITORY

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[Received 9 April 1974. Accepted 29 April 1974]

ABSTRACT

The genus *Notoscincus* comprises a single species which is divisible into two weak subspecies, *N. ornatus ornatus* (Broom) and *N. ornatus wotjulum* (Glauert).

INTRODUCTION

Superficial resemblances between *Notoscincus ornatus ornatus* and species of the *Ctenotus schomburgkii* group led me to suspect that *ornatus* was really a small *Ctenotus* which had evolved an ablepharic eye (as had the smaller species of *Lerista*). I therefore began with *ornatus* in my current revision of the *Ctenotus* of the Kimberley and North-West Divisions but soon discovered that it was far too divergent to be included in that genus.

All the material used in this study is lodged in the Western Australian Museum.

Genus *Notoscincus*

Notoscincus Fuhn (1969: 72). Type-species (by original designation): *Ablepharus ornatus* Broom and *Ablepharus wotjulum* Glauert.

Very small, smooth, terrestrial, pentadactyl skinks with lower eyelid immovable and bearing a large circular transparent disc completely surrounded by granules; no supranasal or postnasal; prefrontals large, one overlapping the other (resulting in a long oblique 'suture' between them); frontal very wide; frontoparietals fused; interparietal large; supraoculars 3, first as large as others combined, broadly in contact with frontal and frontoparietal; supraciliaries mostly 5 or 6, decreasing in height backwards, first in contact with frontal; upper labials 6, fourth subocular and much the widest; ear aperture smaller than palpebral disc, longer axis orientated upwards and slightly backwards, with 0.3 (usually 2) very small and obtuse lobules on anterior margin, uppermost usually largest; laterally expanded nuchals 0.8 (mostly 3) on each side; subdigital lamellae divided.

One species, patchily distributed in rocky, less humid parts of northern Australia.

Notoscincus ornatus ornatus

Ablepharus ornatus Broom, 1896, Ann. Mag. Nat. Hist. (6) 18: 343.
Muldiva, North Queensland (R. Broom).

Diagnosis

Distinguishable from *N. o. wotjulum* by its brown upper lateral stripe broken into a series of rectangular spots, and by paler, more heavily spotted back.

Distribution

Pilbara region of Western Australia and arid interior of Northern Territory. Extralimital in Queensland (semi-arid southern interior of Cape York Peninsula).

Description (characters additional to those listed under genus)

Snout-vent length (mm): 19-39 (N=17, mean 31.5). Length of appendages (% SVL): foreleg 25-30 (N=11, mean 27.7), hindleg 37-49 (N=13, mean 40.8); tail 130-177 (N=4, mean 163).

Nasals separated. Supraciliaries usually 6, occasionally 5, rarely 7. Mid-body scale rows 26-30 (N=13, mean 28.0). Lamellae under fourth toe 20-25 (N=10, mean 22.6).

Dorsally pale bronzy brown, becoming reddish on tail, usually with three longitudinal series of dark brown dots or short dashes on back. Upper lateral zone comprising a series of alternating brown and whitish rectangular spots. Whitish midlateral stripe extending forward to upper lip and back to middle of tail or further, margined above and below by a brown line. Legs pale brown irregularly spotted with dark brown.

Remarks

Depuch Island specimens were misidentified by Storr (1962) as '*Sphenomorphus ocellatus*', and Barrow Island specimens were listed by Butler (1970) under '*Ctenotus wotjulum*'

Material

North-West Division (W.A.): Depuch Island (14552, 14557); Barrow Island (27994-5, 29033-4, 45636-44); Cockeraga River, Chichester Range (39052).

Northern Territory: Hurst Creek, 10 km S of Wauchope (34638).

Notoscincus ornatus wotjulum

Ablepharus wotjulum Glauert, 1959, West. Aust. Nat. 6: 192. Wotjulum Mission, Yampi Sound, Western Australia (K.G. Buller and A.M. Douglas).

Diagnosis

Distinguishable from *N. o. ornatus* by broad unbroken blackish upper lateral stripe, and darker, less spotted back; also slightly smaller with relatively shorter legs and tail, and fewer subdigital lamellae.

Distribution

Far north of Western Australia south to Yampi Sound, the King Leopold

Range and Lake Argyle, and far north of Northern Territory (Arnhem Land plateau).

Description (characters additional to those listed under genus)

Snout-vent length (mm): 17-36 (N=20, mean 28.7). Length of appendages (% SVL): foreleg 21-30 (N=19, mean 25.3), hindleg 28-43 (N=18, mean 36.8), tail 122-158 (N=6, mean 149).

Nasals narrowly separated (in short contact in one specimen). Supraciliaries 5 or 6. Midbody scale rows 25-30 (N=10, mean 28.2). Lamellae under fourth toe 17-24 (N= 14, mean 20.6).

Dorsally olive grey (one specimen with a vertebral series of dark spots). Broad blackish brown upper lateral stripe extending forward to lores and back on to tail (on which it breaks up into a series of spots), usually margined above by a white dorsolateral line. Whitish midlateral stripe. Lower lateral zone dark brown, markings tending to form 2-4 longitudinal lines.

Remarks

It is not yet certain whether recognition of *N. o. wotjulum* is justifiable. The two specimens (27996 and 42793) from the Ord drainage, significantly the driest part of the subspecies' range, approach the nominate subspecies in having the dark upper lateral stripe broken by a series of small pale spots. On the other hand our single specimen (39052) of *N. o. ornatus* from the Pilbara



Map of Western Australia and Northern Territory showing location of specimens of *Notoscincus ornatus ornatus* and *Notoscincus ornatus wotjulum*.

mainland has the upper lateral zone (but not the back) precisely as in *N.o. wotjulum*. Thus the differences between the two subspecies are partly bridged by individual or regional variants. Moreover each isolated population of both subspecies seems to have characters of its own, e.g. low subdigital lamellar counts at Oenpelli and wide separation of brown upper lateral spots at Wauchope.

Material

Kimberley Division (W.A.): Sir Graham Moore Island (44068); Kalumburu (28000); South-west Osborne Island (41499); Crystal Creek, Admiralty Gulf (43108); Amax Camp, Mitchell Plateau (44264-5); Katers Island (41473-5); Wollaston Island (41467); Bigge Island (41441); Boongaree Island (44092); Augustus Island (41295); Wotjulum (11129, 11799-800); Inglis Gap (27999); Parry Creek (27996); Hicks Creek (right-bank tributary of the Ord) (42793).

Northern Territory: 8 km SE of Oenpelli (37171-2).

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